



PRONiCA

News from Nicaragua

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Quakers in Solidarity with Nicaraguans for 26 Years

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Reflections on War and Mothers

Kathy Hersh, ProNica Co-clerk and Board Member

I was a young correspondent for ABC News, covering the 1979 civil war in Nicaragua. I had heard that a group of refugees from the northern city of Esteli had fled to Masaya, near the capital of Managua, where most of the foreign press was based. I wanted to get eyewitness accounts of the bombing of Esteli, a Sandinista stronghold, where the fighting, we'd heard, had been horrendous.

I had heard that many of the refugees were squatting in an unfinished housing project called City of Hope, named after the dictator Anastasio Somoza's wife. The project had been intended as low income housing but was never completed. The commonly held belief was that Somoza had kept the money.

I found two women surrounded by their children, cooking a pot of beans on a makeshift stove. They explained that they were sisters-in-law, both widowed by the war. They had fled for their lives, scared, exhausted, and wondering how they were going to feed their kids.

"Where did you get the beans?"

They explained that a nun had come by two days ago and given them the beans. They had just enough

leftover to feed themselves that day. We were standing together, encircled by eight children, one of them blind. But the child they were most worried about was the one who had not spoken a single word since the bombing.

She appeared to be in shock.

"And what will you eat tomorrow?"

There are some questions reporters must ask.

"We don't know," they said and then they fell silent, almost prayerful.

I reached into my pocket and pulled out what little money I was carrying on me and handed it to them. They began to cry and so did I.



Depictions of war - like this mural in Esteli - still abound in Nicaragua.

War is not selective in its victims. Women and children get caught in the crossfire and die, or starve, uprooted from their homes and communities. Like these women, many fled to the relative safety of Managua, often too poor to return after the war, even if they had a home to return to.

That is why ProNica has stayed for 26 years in Nicaragua. The fighting may have ended long ago but a war is never really over for its victims. In spite of the trauma, Nicaraguans strive everyday to rebuild their country. Hope has new faces and new dreams for the future. □

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ProNica's Mission is building sustainable cross-cultural relationships between the peoples of Nicaragua and North America using Quaker values.

ProNica's Vision is solidarity that empowers and educates Nicaraguans and North Americans.

ProNica assists in creating and sustaining programs by and for the Nicaraguan people. These projects hold promise for grassroots growth, arise from Nicaraguan needs and tradition, and provide not only survival but also empowerment.

ProNica's priorities are community cohesiveness and economic development, non-violence training, health, education, sustainable agriculture and women's empowerment. We seek to link Nicaraguan people with concerned individuals internationally to promote understanding and mutual action. We educate those who seek information or wish to serve.

Our work is accomplished by an international core of dedicated volunteers and staff who seek to embody Quaker principles of consensual decision making and action and respect for that of God in everyone. This service project arose from a deep concern over the international exploitation of the Nicaraguan people and resources and a wish to respond in practical and constructive ways.

ProNica, Incorporated is a 501(c)(3) tax exempt corporation under the spiritual care of the Southeastern Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) with offices in St. Petersburg, Florida and Managua, Nicaragua. ProNica is a registered Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) in Nicaragua.

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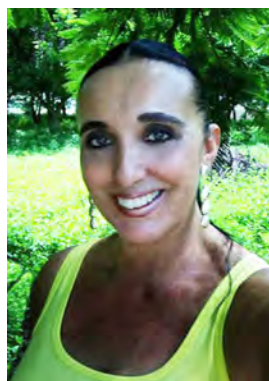
Our Deepest Appreciation to Tim Fogarty for Service to ProNica



Tim Fogarty (back) in Nicaragua with UF students in 2012

University of Florida Anthropology Professor, Tim Fogarty, joined the ProNica Board of Directors five years ago, having already worked with more than a dozen Nicaragua-based nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and having participated in over 30 delegations in Central America. His contributions to the integrity of ProNica's solidarity model have been truly invaluable. We're grateful to Tim for his generous gifts of time, spirit and expertise, and we wish him many blessings in his future endeavors. □

Thank You and Best Wishes Carmen Gonzalez-Ruiz



Carmen on her farm

Carmen Gonzalez-Ruiz spent the past three years as ProNica's beloved Delegation Leader. Originally from Spain, Carmen moved to Nicaragua during the 1980s as a journalist covering the revolution. Soon after arrival, she fell in love with the country and has called it home ever since. Her bubbly personality, extensive knowledge of Nicaraguan culture, and caring nature made her an ideal fit for her role with ProNica. She guided students through urban slums, to presentations by inspiring community activists and to homestays in tightly knit rural communities—all the while affectionately nurturing the students' inner journeys. We wish Carmen the very best as she sets out in exciting new pursuits. □

Nicaragua Remains My Reference Point for Compassion

Samantha Bonen Clark, University of Florida Delegate and Volunteer

International volunteering is an undertaking that each person experiences somewhat differently. My experience with ProNica last summer was unexpected and ended up being a leap of faith that has had a profound effect on me as a student, a North American, and as a person.

I first came to Nicaragua on a five-week student delegation from the University of Florida. Excited and not knowing what to expect, my group landed in Managua and I literally felt as though I could not open my eyes wide enough. Everything I saw gave me pause, from big statements like the war-torn cathedral in the Plaza de la Revolución to details like the fact that the streets don't have names. Over our course of study and travel, led by my professor and ProNica board member, Dr. Tim Fogarty, my curiosity turned to fascination and I decided that I was not quite ready to leave.

Acting on little more than a gut feeling and an impulse, I approached ProNica's Program Director at the time, Lillian Hall, and asked if there was any volunteer work to be done. Her resounding and enthusiastic, "Yes, of course!" marked the extension of my trip and the beginning of my volunteer experience with ProNica. In the seven weeks that followed, I lived with a Nicaraguan family, helped with a variety of office tasks and was a member of the Batahola Norte Community Center volunteer program (a program started by Laura Hopps, ProNica's new Program Director!). My dual volunteer role gave me the opportunity to travel, get a more in depth look at a multitude of ProNica's projects, and work side by side with a variety of people, both volunteers and Nicaraguans.

Now, many months after my return to the United States and elbows deep in my life as a college student, my experience in Nicaragua serves as a constant reminder that the world is actually much bigger than the one that I knew. It took time for me to readjust: I kept thinking of prices in terms of cordobas (Nicaraguan currency). The first time I went to a restaurant I tried to speak to the server in Spanish. My sister got mad at me for driving slowly. And the different toothpaste options at Wal-mart

were overwhelming. It was almost comical, but coming back to the U.S. from a country and a culture that find enjoyment in simple things and see being fifteen minutes late as being on time, made my head spin. I missed walking and taking the bus to work, the hours-long chats on politics and Harry Potter with my host family, teaching my Nicaraguan grandmother about chocolate chip cookies, and the hustle and bustle of school children around the cultural center.



Samantha at a parade in Managua

Even though I've now recovered from the shock, Nicaragua remains a reference point for me. I feel more appreciation for compassion and generosity, and a repulsion for wastefulness that I did not feel before. I'm no longer able to look away from poverty, and news of people being displaced by war or disasters strikes a new chord in me. Even in school my experience serves as inspiration. I study Spanish, Latin American Studies, and International Relations. We discuss developing countries in my classes, and rather than regurgitating textbook information I feel as though I now have real experiences to draw from. I have seen the mountainside farms of poor people marginalized by multinational corporations, walked every day by groups of destitute veterans with no social program to fall back on, and given out hugs to children whose families live in the dump because that is how they make ends meet.

Twelve weeks does not sound like very much time, but the twelve weeks I spent studying and volunteering with ProNica in Nicaragua fundamentally affected me. Adjusting to life in a foreign place was challenging, but the warmth and generosity I received from my colleagues and community made me feel at home. I was confronted with perspectives and realities much different from the ones that I knew; they solidified some of my convictions and made me reevaluate others. My path forward is hardly clear from here, but Nicaragua and its people have taught me that with faith and conviction, I just may not need exact road names and clear directions to get where I most need to go. □

For more information on becoming a ProNica Volunteer, visit www.pronica.org/volunteers/

ProNica Board of Directors—New Member Profile

Johannes Werner



Johannes Werner

Throughout my adult life, I have been trying to understand the causes of poverty and the development gap that used to so clearly divide North and South. That borderline between wealth and poverty is shifting now, and I have been fascinated with the economic booms in countries such as China, India and Brazil, and the increasing emancipation and political power of once-marginalized

people throughout Latin America.

Having grown up in relative comfort in (West) Germany, I was led to live and work in Mexico, Cuba and other

Latin American nations, making a living as an economic journalist. I had my first introduction to Quakerism at the Casa de los Amigos in Mexico City and married a Mexican Quaker. We eventually settled in Florida, where we are raising our now 10-year old son. From here, I travel frequently to Cuba, and publish and edit www.cubastandard.com, a Website dedicated to economic and business news about the island. I also publish freelance columns and produce Florida Caribe (<http://florida-caribe.podomatic.com>), a show aired by community radio station WSLR 96.5 FM about political, social, economic and cultural trends in Latin America, and their impact on the United States.

I have a master's degree (Magister) in Modern History and Latin American literature from Freie Universität Berlin; I am a fluent Spanish speaker and writer. □

ProNica Board of Directors—New Member Profile

Kaye Edwards

My interest in Nicaragua was first kindled in the 1980s while I was at Harvard Medical School doing biological research on the tropical parasite, Leishmania. A student in the lab introduced me to Oxfam's book, *Nicaragua. The Threat of a Good Example?*, and I was captivated by the literacy and health campaigns that followed the Sandinista Revolution. Although I put the book aside when I joined the faculty at Haverford College, Nicaragua kept resurfacing in my life—through a forum on ProNica at my Quaker meeting, through news about the Iran-Contra affair and Hurricane Mitch, and through conversations with students and friends who had lived and worked in the country. Finally, in 2010, I responded to these persistent nudges and traveled to Nicaragua with six Haverford students on a ProNica delegation. There, we not only experienced first-hand the natural beauty of the country and the

warmth, creativity and resiliency of its people, but saw how solidarity nurtures ProNica's continuing work with its grassroots partners. Those ten days in Nicaragua so inspired me that I organized a second ProNica delegation for Haverford students in 2012 and returned this past January with my husband, Rob Knowlton, to study Spanish and to learn more about programs to improve women's health in the country. As a convinced Friend, I seek to integrate my professional work in biomedicine, social justice, and experiential learning with activism inspired by Quaker testimonies. I am currently developing collaborations to reduce cervical cancer in communities in and around Matagalpa and will be teaching a new course, "Reproductive Health and Justice," which includes a ProNica-led delegation for 12 Haverford and Bryn Mawr College students. □



Kaye in Nicaragua in 2012

ProNica has one vacancy on the Board of Directors. To nominate someone, please send your endorsement to: ProNica, Inc., 130 19th Ave SE, St. Petersburg, FL 33705-2810 or email: stateside@pronica.org

Village Has Emigration Concerns as First Generation Enrolls in College

Johannes Werner, ProNica Board of Directors

While the Martín Centeno community was kicked around among three different locations from the 1970s through the late 1980s, they are now by many measures, a thriving village. For two-and-half decades the 70 families that make up the community have been able to hold on to, cultivate, and otherwise use their land, near the frontier town of Río Blanco. Now, their milk and Cuaja cheese sell for good prices at a nearby dairy cooperative.

Their main point of pride is that the dairy farmer village in the heart of the country has not lost a baby, child or pregnant mother in years; that's quite a feat for rural Nicaragua. Even a recent cholera epidemic left them nearly unscathed. With little or no government help, the Centeno villagers together built a water supply system, a road, and two bridges, as well as a community garden, some of it funded by ProNica. They share their pain, they pray together, they work together, and they play together. Martín Centeno is a true community.

But now, they are facing an entirely new challenge. The first generation of young people is enrolled in college, and their parents and community leaders expect the youngsters to return to the village, or at least continue to be closely connected with the community, after they graduate. When asked, most of the young people express the same desire. This is not surprising; quality of life is high in this tight-knit community, the degree of involvement of the young in community affairs is very high, and they know that making it in the outside world is, to say the least, tough.

If the young succeed in staying, Martín Centeno would be the exception to the rule. We live in an era of unprecedented mass migration. In the minds of most Nicaraguans, there is no making it in their village. In order to achieve personal success, most believe they have to emigrate to the capital, to neighboring Costa Rica, or to the United States.

But the cost of emigration — in terms of broken families, physical and mental injuries, and uprootedness — is enormous. And for every success story, there are dozens of failures. As village leader Adilia Vega Vega

puts it, rather modestly: "So many of those who left are worse off than those of us who stayed behind!"

Whether this generation of college graduates will be able to use their new skills to the fullest at Martín Centeno is uncertain, though. The group with the best odds to succeed is the half-dozen young men that have studied, or are studying, agronomy. Their knowledge is welcome in their families' farming businesses, in joint agricultural projects the community may launch — such as cacao cultivation — or on ranches in the wider Río Blanco area, which is a hotspot of Nicaragua's booming cattle industry. Even so, it sure won't be easy to make their skills usable, and translate them into higher income.



It remains uncertain whether these young women will be able to return to their village after college

And then, there are two young women who will be facing even bigger challenges. One is already commuting to Managua — a five-hour bus ride away — to study journalism. While Río Blanco is already home to two radio stations, they only provide a few salaried jobs. The other young woman is focused like a laser on becoming a computer systems engineer. However, demand for computer services in and around cow town Río Blanco isn't high. Even in Managua, IT jobs are few and far between, and only people with the right (family) connections, or international credentials, typically land those jobs.

In other words, having the youth stay put is a steep uphill struggle. But it's an important one, and as far as rural communities in Nicaragua go, Martín

Centeno has among the higher odds to succeed. That's why ProNica has been closely following discussions among community leaders and youth, trying to assess what measures would make the biggest difference for young people.

Internet access is the top priority that has emerged from these deliberations. Broadband Internet access via a router and five or six PCs at the community center would be fairly easy to install. For the younger kids, the leaders argue, it would save them the 15-minute walk across the river and through the "red light district" of Río Blanco to get to the nearest cyber cafe. For the young people in college, or future college graduates, it would be a convenient study and work tool. □

\$4,160 will fully sponsor internet access, computers and the infrastructure required to meet the computing and technology needs of youth and college students of the Martín Centeno Community

Maria Elena Bonilla of Acahualinca—Setting Out

Margaret Lowe, Harvard Divinity School

“So they set out and went from village to village, preaching the gospel and healing people everywhere.” What a charge! Can you imagine it? Let’s try to put ourselves in the disciples’ position. You get to pick the diseases: perhaps it’s homelessness or gun violence or maybe economic injustice, climate change, peace in the middle-east, or alleviating the daily despair of so many in our midst. Simple problems, right? (ha) Overwhelmed? Frozen? Don’t know where to start? Feeling guilty? Now, we can imagine just how the disciples felt.

And yet, they set out. Just as Maria Elena Bonilla did; a woman I met just a few weeks ago in Nicaragua. Commanding but joyful and gentle, she began her story. “At sixteen,” she recounted, “war raged all around me. A brutal dictatorship ravaged my neighborhood; best friends, brothers, fathers died or disappeared. What to do? What to do? Yes, yes, she said, I will support armed struggle, the guerrillas, the Sandinistas.” And then, sweet victory: July 19th, 1979 – the Day of Triumph. Flushed with new hope, infused with “the power and authority” of a faith-filled disciple, she set out into her kingdom of God: And what did she find? Not triumph but her poor, poor neighborhood—ransacked by war and earthquakes and all manner of her nation’s diseases and demons—especially the insidious demons evoked by personal and political trauma—bone-chilling fear and despair. Who to trust? What to do?

Clipboard in hand she “took took little else for the journey.” Yes, some bread, perhaps a bag but no education, no money and no concrete plan. No staff and not an extra tunic. But she knew this neighborhood and she knew its women. She was not alone. She was among her twelve—a few women, just like her—acting on a deep-abiding faith. As in Luke, “so they set out and went from village to village,

preaching the gospel and healing people everywhere.” No need for introduction or invitation, this was their neighborhood. They entered the houses and as Jesus commanded, stayed and stayed. Asking, listening. Ever had a check-up? A pap smear? Did you have your babies at home? How many miscarriages? Does he hit you? No, no, Maria Elena didn’t reveal that she lacked health care, that sometimes her husband also hit her; and that she and her twelve had set out on the journey with nothing.



Acahualinca Women’s Center Director,
Maria Elena Bonilla

Well, not nothing - only if you consider stepping forward in faith nothing. Maria Elena preached the gospel of listening, connecting, compassion, humor, kindness; the gospel of breaking the silence—and of collecting the hard data. Soon, she had her “community diagnostic”—the most basic information any funding agency would require.

“No,” she told Oxfam, “I don’t have the completed application. (She didn’t tell them she was illiterate!) No, no references but let me tell you my story.”

Well, you get the drift by now. Soon, Maria Elena was hiring doctors, scheduling appointments and literally building—board by board—what now stands as a full-fledged health clinic—still in her neighborhood, right next to the city dump, one of the poorest neighborhoods in Managua. Since 1992, the clinic has provided everything from routine check-ups to tubal ligations. But that’s not all. It has a small in-house pharmacy, a lending library, a lab for simple testing, and space for the gamut of workshops they offer each week. Even beauty classes but those beauty classes train women to be entrepreneurs in their own homes.

So, how did Maria Elena do it? How did she say yes, I’ll be one of the twelve? The trick here is not to romanticize her. No we must resist putting Maria Elena on a pedestal—though tempting. Yes, it’s very tempting, just as it was tempting for the disciples to

imagine that some other group of twelve was more prepared, more gifted, more ready to set out; to leave their homes, to preach and to heal. Those who do such incredible “good works,” miracles really, can’t be just like us. They must be more inspired, more intelligent, creative and certainly braver than us. These are perhaps our demons. The demons that whisper it’s too much, I’m too small, all alone, the problems too entrenched, too large.”

What allowed Maria Elena and what might allow us to take that step? Faith—not certainty—but faith. No, they—Maria Elena and her friends—just like the twelve and just like us had doubts, plenty of doubts. Still, amidst doubts; they stepped forward in faith—all sorts of faith: faith in the moment, faith in

their mission, faith in each other, faith in their nation; faith in God’s all empowering love. Yes, they had just enough faith to take that first, initial step. Just as they chose faith; just as they leaned in hard, so can we. Jesus asked his disciples “to visit the houses and to stay.” In doing so, they, like Maria Elena, did heal the sick. She and her co-disciples may not have “driven out all the demons” but they did perform miracles; they did uplift their neighborhood; they did and still do, God’s good work. Jesus invited the disciples into the unknown. Maria Elena followed and so can we—whatever our cause—whatever the demons and diseases we hope to alleviate, we too can dust off our feet and let our lives be a testimony to the transformative power of just doing the next right thing; of just taking that first faith-filled step. □

Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) at Quaker House

Several ProNica partners including youth leaders from Los Quinchos, members of the Casa de la Mujer Domestic Violence Network, and conflict mediators from the village of Martin Centeno participated in May AVP workshops at Quaker House.

The Nicaraguan AVP facilitators used games, role-playing and interactive experiences to help participants examine their responses to injustice, prejudice, frustration and anger. Facilitators and participants



AVP facilitators with Level I graduates

were very moved by the experience and are determined to continue the series through Levels 2 and 3 (training for facilitators).

The first level workshops were fully

funded thanks to generous sponsorship by a professor from Trinity University in Texas. In order to complete the series, we’ll need to raise an additional \$1,100. □

To learn more about AVP, please visit:
www.avpinternational.org

To support ProNica’s AVP program, simply mark “AVP” in the memo line of your donation check.

There are many ways to stand in solidarity with Maria Elena and the Acahualinca Women’s Center: Meet the staff and tour the Center on a Friends Witness trip. Volunteer. Become a monthly donor.

Capacity for Joy and Sharing

Susan Davies, ProNica volunteer



Susan Davies

In March 2013, I spent a week and a half volunteering at the Acahualinca Clinic, taking the opportunity to be introduced to the work there and the involvement of ProNica. Probably the highlight for me was the celebration of International Women’s Day, participating in the preparation for the day and then the grand party at the Clinic in the afternoon. The capacity for joy and sharing of food and dance was really evident in the community, as was the sense folks had of feeling at home in that clinic space. The work I was able to contribute as a lactation consultant was the preparation of drafts of 2 pamphlets to be used in ongoing education and conversations with women. I moved from computer to computer as the staff was able to make one available, so I had a chance to sit in several offices. One of the pamphlets was about the importance of exclusive breastfeeding in a baby’s first 6 months of life, and the second was about the introduction of complementary foods rich in micronutrients in the baby’s second 6 months. Maria Elena is going to send the drafts to a volunteer with graphics skills, and I very much look forward to seeing the finished product! □

*Casa
Cuáquera*



José and Panchita welcome you

Quaker House

The hospitality house offers simple lodging in Managua. Located in a quiet residential neighborhood, it is convenient to shopping, banks and restaurants. There is meeting space, wifi and a fully equipped kitchen or catering available.

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In this tough global economic environment, it is even tougher for the poorest of the poor.
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